

O 061949Z AUG 94  
FM USINT HAVANA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1969  
INFO CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL  
COMDT COGARD WASHDC  
FBIS KEY WEST  
USCINCLANT NORFOLK VA  
COMNAVBASE GUANTANAMO BAY  
JTLO MIAMI  
USIA WASHDC 7936

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 005167

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR  
TAGS: PREL PREF PGOV CU  
SUBJECT: BEHIND CASTRO'S THREATS

REF: HAVANA 5150

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. WHY THE CHANGE IN GOC ATTITUDE TOWARD MASSIVE EMIGRATION? FOR YEARS NOW, MOST OBSERVERS HAD JUDGED THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT AS UNLIKELY TO STAGE ANOTHER MARIEL OR TO OPEN ITS SHORES TO FREE EMIGRATION FOR FEAR OF UNLEASHING A SITUATION WHICH IT COULD NOT CONTROL. WHAT HAPPENED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS TO CHANGE THIS SITUATION WAS THAT CUBAN AUTHORITIES WERE GRADUALLY LOSING CONTROL, EVEN WHILE SEEKING TO PREVENT ILLEGAL EMIGRATION. THE RATE OF ILLEGAL DEPARTURES BY REFUGEES TAKING CUBAN GOVERNMENT BOATS HAS INCREASED GEOMETRICALLY IN THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS.

¶3. THE SITUATION WAS DRAMATICALLY AGGRAVATED BY THE DROWNINGS OF OVER THIRTY FLEEING CUBANS ON JULY 13 IN THE TUGBOAT SUNK BY THE ACTIONS OF OTHER TUGBOATS. THE NEGATIVE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION AND DOMESTIC DISCONTENT WHICH THIS INCIDENT PRODUCED ADDED GREATLY TO GOVERNMENT PRESSURES BY MAKING VIOLENT EFFORTS TO DETER BOAT THEFTS UNPALATABLE. THE APPARENT USE OF WEAPONS TO SEIZE HIGHLY VISIBLE HAVANA HARBOR FERRIES WAS A MAJOR IRRITANT AND THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE USG WOULD NOT ACT SERIOUSLY TO PUNISH ANY PERPETRATORS. THE WIDESPREAD PUBLIC ANXIOUSNESS TO FLEE THE ISLAND PRODUCED BY THESE FERRY FLIGHTS LED ON AUGUST 5 TO HUGE CROWDS WHICH SOON TURNED FROM THOUGHTS OF FLIGHT TO ANTI GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND LOOTING.

¶4. THE GOVERNMENT THUS WAS INCREASINGLY FACING A SITUATION IN WHICH IT FEARED LOSING CONTROL, EVEN AS IT SOUGHT TO PREVENT EMIGRATION. IT IS IN THIS LIGHT THAT FIDEL CASTRO'S DECISION TO THREATEN TO UNLEASH MASSIVE REFUGEE FLIGHT UPON THE U.S. CAN BE UNDERSTOOD. WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH A DECISION COULD STIMULATE DEPARTURE EFFORTS BY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, EVEN THOUGH PRIVATELY HELD VESSELS ARE RARE. CUBA WOULD INDEED BE TAKING A SERIOUS RISK IN OPENING ITS BORDERS -- PROBABLY EVEN A GREATER ONE THAN IT REALIZES, BUT CUBAN AUTHORITIES ALREADY FELT THEMSELVES RUNNING GROWING RISKS. BY MAKING THE THREAT AND PERHAPS IMPLEMENTING IT, THEY HOPE TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE U.S. TO ALTER ITS IMMIGRATION POLICY IN WAYS WHICH WOULD DIMINISH THE PRESSURES ON CUBAN AUTHORITIES.

SULLIVAN